

Sandoval Leads Wilson to SoCal HS Title

Written by Alex Goff

Tuesday, 19 February 2013 20:48

The Wilson High School won their second straight Southern California High School Championship Saturday, defeating a very strong Torrey Pines team 48-19 in an impressive display.

Torrey Pines was missing some of their starters, which didn't help them, but they competed very well for the first 20 minutes, before Wilson started to take control.

"Both teams were leaking points," said Wilson Head Coach Ray Egan. "Both were very good on attack but defensive systems were poor. Midway through the first half we made some adjustments at the breakdown and started to really control possession. That translated into field position, and then we put away most of our opportunities from there."

This Wilson squad was virtually the same that won the title last year, and several of those players will be back for another round. As it is, this winter they turn their attention to the SoCal U19 season, which starts this coming weekend, as Wilson joins with players from a few other schools to form Belmont Shore.

Egan, who took over the Wilson HS program from Gavin Hickie, who is now coaching Dartmouth, said he was concerned about the transition.

"I didn't want us just to improve because we got bigger and older, I wanted to keep developing the skills of the players," he said. "I wanted to make sure they were progressing as rugby players. I think we did that, although I would say this was our weakest defensive performance. Torrey Pines is a very good team, and well-drilled at ruck time and have some exciting backs. For us, in a short season where we weren't really challenged, the challenge is for the boys to understand what they have to do at the next level."

Egan said many of his players started playing around age 10, giving them as many as seven years of rugby experience.

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"They are a great bunch of kids, and hungry for success, and I think several of them have real potential long-term," said Egan.

Leading the way was High School All American hooker Andy Sandoval, who played flanker in the final and scored four tries. He showcased some excellent speed as well as solidity in contact.

Reed Heynan and Connor Cudeback rounded out an excellent back row. Up front props John Martin and Bruce Young continued their strong form, while the midfield combination of Hayden Sooter and Aisea Tongilava were a handful. At fullback, Mitchell Gusman played well, as did his opposite number, Jake Goena.

The team only had a couple of days to celebrate before looking ahead to the U19 season. Egan is expected to step down to an assistant role as the Belmont Shore men's team's season gets especially busy.